

## Olive Thrush

### Olyflyster

*Turdus olivaceus*

The Olive Thrush is the southern representative of a group of similar-looking Afromontane forest thrushes. It is widespread in South Africa, being absent from the driest parts of the northern Cape Province and the western Karoo, and the tropical low-lying parts of northern KwaZulu-Natal, the eastern Transvaal and the Limpopo Valley. The range tracks the Orange River through the arid northern Cape Province and the Fish River in southern Namibia. It is absent from the highlands of Lesotho and most of Swaziland. There is an isolated population in the eastern Zimbabwe highlands where the subspecies *T. o. swynnertoni* is endemic (Clancey 1980b). A further five subspecies (Clancey 1980b; Clancey *et al.* 1987) appear to have continuous ranges.

It is rather shy and unobtrusive in its natural habitat and may occasionally have been confused with the Kurrichane Thrush *T. libonyana* (e.g. Cowgill & Davis 1994).

**Habitat:** It prefers riverine bush and montane forest. It has adapted to plantations, gardens, parks and orchards (Maclean 1993b), particularly well-shaded places with damp soil and moist litter. The vegetation types in which it was most frequently reported indicate that it is widespread in open biomes, including the Karoo and the southern fringes of the Kalahari, which have patches of dense riverine bush or forest and a suite of artificial habitats. These habitats have enabled it to expand its range outside forested areas. It is likely that only a small proportion of South African Olive Thrushes now live in forest.

**Movements:** It is generally considered a resident (Maclean 1993b) and the models do not indicate large-scale movements. The small seasonal variation in reporting rates may be attributed to increased conspicuousness when it is singing in the breeding season, and conversely when it is silent during the post-breeding moult. Altitudinal migration is suspected in KwaZulu-Natal (Johnson & Maclean 1994), but the zoning in the present analysis is unsuitable to investigate this. Ringing recoveries indicate considerable dispersal: 12 of 132 recoveries were at dis-

tances over 20 km, of which three birds were reported more than 90 km away from the place of ringing (SAFRING).

**Breeding:** Most breeding is in spring and early summer, synchronized in all Zones, except for the winter-rainfall region (Zone 4) where breeding is about a month earlier. Breeding may occur almost throughout the year. The models confirm published information (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), except that a secondary peak in autumn (Winterbottom, M.G. 1966) is not apparent in the present data for Zone 4.

**Interspecific relationships:** Both Olive and Kurrichane Thrushes have expanded their ranges into man-made habitats. The two species are sympatric in areas of KwaZulu-Natal, the Transvaal and southeastern Botswana, and incidents of hybridization have been suggested (e.g. Cowgill & Davis 1994).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** In the 1930s its range was divided into three populations: forest-dwelling birds in 'the

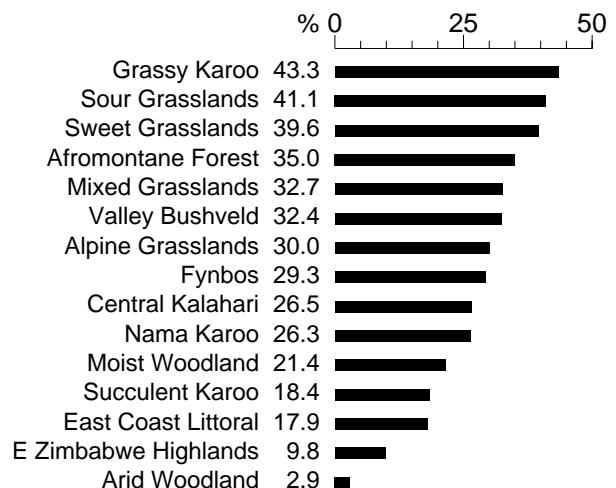
southern Cape Province, eastwards to KwaZulu-Natal and northwards to the Zoutpansberg'; an isolated population of forest birds in eastern Zimbabwe; and a third population of birds living in habitats away from forests, which extended from the Transvaal highveld through the Free State and along the Orange River to southern Namibia (Roberts 1940).

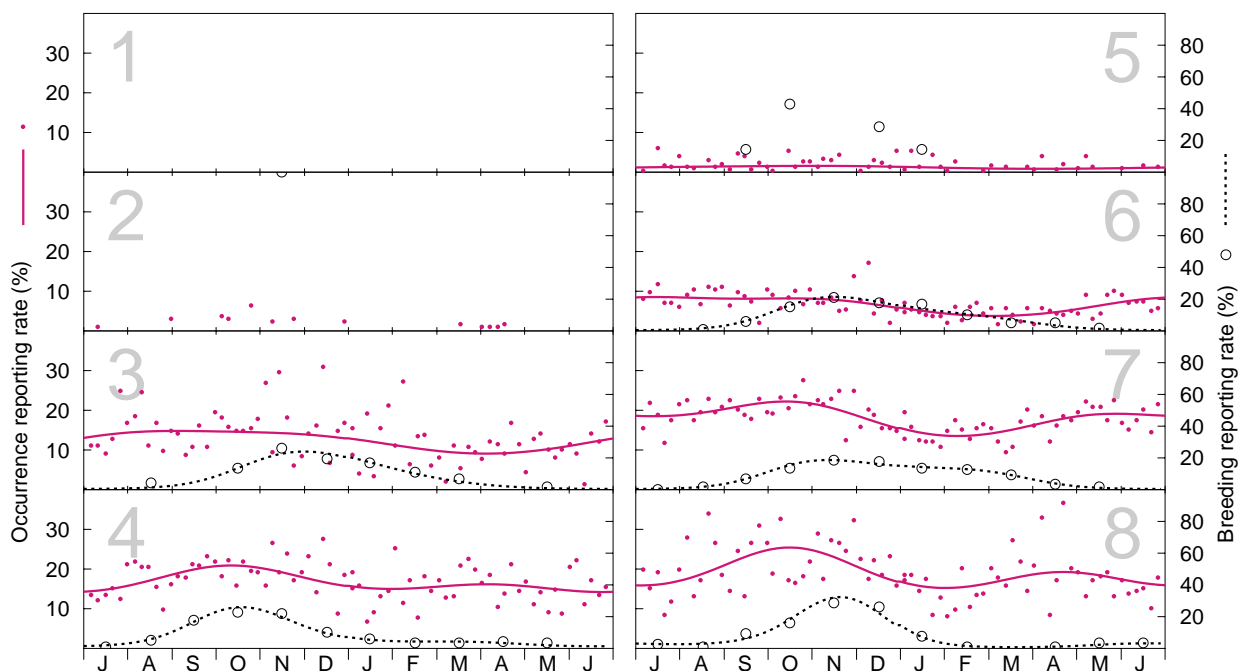
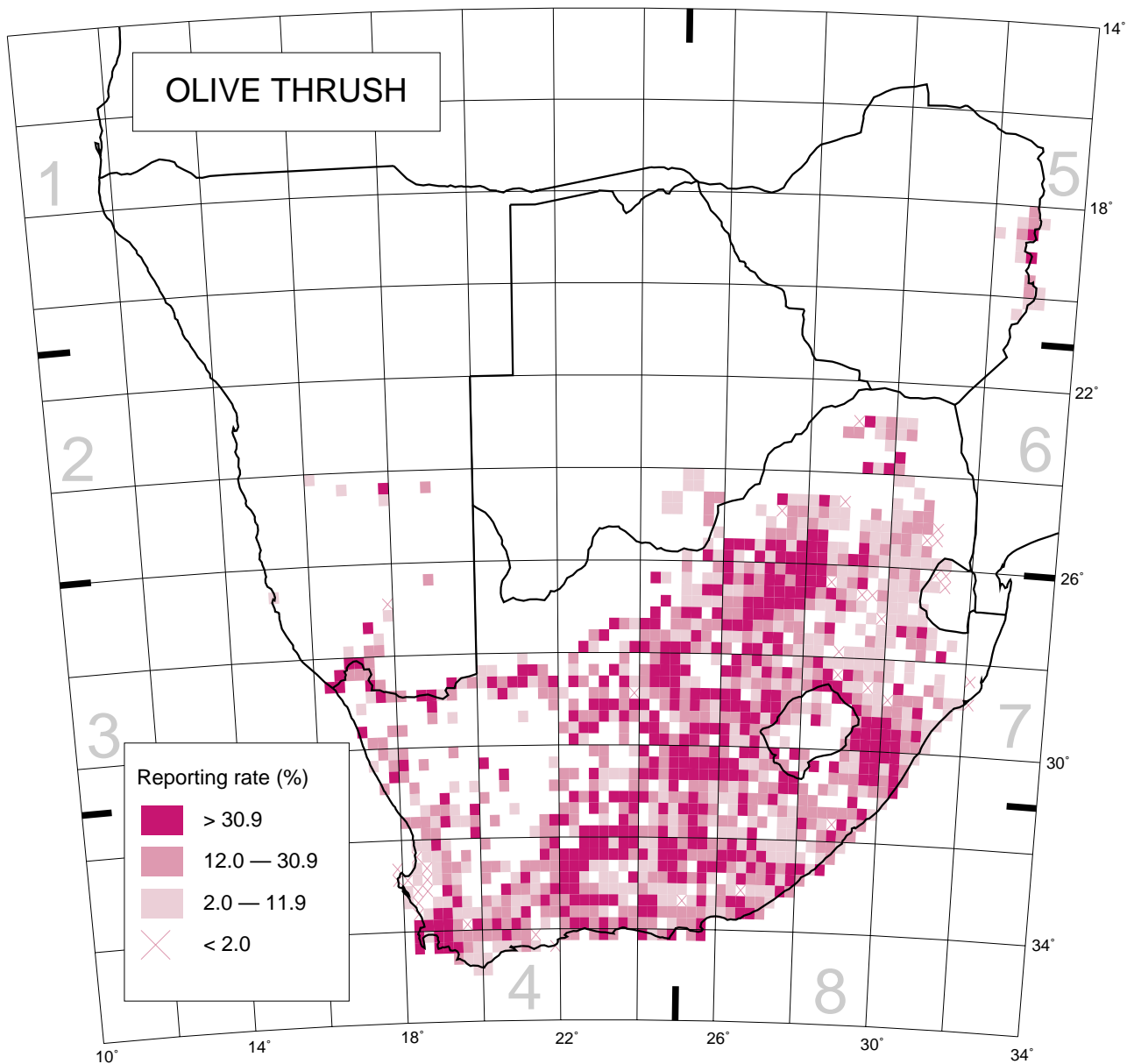
In the 1980s and 1990s, the distribution was considerably more extensive, encompassing much of the Cape Province and Free State. Although still scarce in parts of the Karoo, Lesotho and Swaziland, the Olive Thrush has expanded its range on all fronts. At the northwestern edge of the range, it has recently arrived west of the upper Limpopo River tributaries in southeastern Botswana, where it was unrecorded by Beesley & Irving (1976).

*C.J. Vernon and M. Herremans*

Recorded in 1196 grid cells, 26.4%  
Total number of records: 32 675  
Mean reporting rate for range: 34.3%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 0, 14, 681, 1461, 108, 752, 3534, 1052; Breeding: 0, 1, 46, 241, 7, 204, 513, 91.